

"Had he lived longer, he would've been left bitter"

Sensitive and soulful, Madan Mohan's music has survived time and trends. But he died a disillusioned man. Son **Sanjeev Kohli** shares the reasons with **Farhana Farook**

Hamare baad is mehfil main afsane bayan honge, Baharen humko dhoondengi na jaane hum kahan honge...

Nothing sums up the bitter-sweet journey of maestro Madan Mohan than these lyrics written by Majrooh Sultanpuri and tuned by the late composer himself for *Baaghi* (1953). "Dad never got his due in his lifetime. His hurt was deep. He won appreciation but commercial success eluded him. Those days the barometer of success was that you compose music for big banners, with big stars, the film had to be a silver jubilee, and your song had to top the *Binaca Geetmala*

(a popular radio show). Above all, you had to win the Filmfare Award. And dad never achieved any of these," laments Madan Mohan's eldest son Sanjeev Kohli (director and senior consultant of Yash Raj Films). "*Aap ki nazron ne samjha* (*Anpadh*) stuck on No. 2 in the *Binaca Geetmala*. *Yeh baat unhein chubhti hogi*."

Sanjeev still can't forget the day when his father hit *The Times of India* headlines on July 14, 1975. But that was only after he was no more! "The pall bearers of his body were Rajesh Khanna, Dharmendra, Amitabh Bachchan and Rajendra Kumar. He had made it to the front page because of the stars." Somewhere it became Sanjeev's crusade to keep alive his father's music and memory. And uncannily, Madan Mohan's popularity swelled after his demise.

"*Mausam* (1975) became a silver jubilee hit and *Laila Majnu* (1979) a golden one. *Koi patthar se* (*Laila Majnu*) became the *Binaca Geetmala* topper for 11 weeks." Interestingly, after three decades his tunes were used in Yash Chopra's *Veer-Zaara*. "The *Billboard* magazine (US) said that it's unprecedented that 30 years after the demise of a musician his tunes have been used. I saw my father's name at the Empire in Leicester Square and at the Loews on Broadway," says a vindicated Sanjeev. As Lata Mangeshkar once said, "Some *kundlis* (horoscopes) open up after the person's death." And



Sanjeev Kohli

that's the story of Madan Mohan. Sanjeev remembers the father he loved and the genius we lost...

Musical Memories

"My earliest memory of dad is of him taking us children (including Sanjeev's older sister Sangeeta and younger brother Sameer) to shop for the choicest meats at Null Bazaar on Saturdays. Then we'd go to Crawford market to buy vegetables. He'd then treat us to Badshah's (famous cold drink house) *falooda*. Back home he'd whip up strange dishes like *bhindi* mutton and *baingan*

Khayyam saab would tell dad (Madan Mohan), 'I love you but I'm jealous of you. When Lata Mangeshkar sings for you she sounds like someone else'



Lata Mangeshkar with the late music director Madan Mohan



Tum jo mil gaye ho... (Hanste Zakhm)



Lag jaa gale... (Woh Kaun Thi)



Aap ki nazron ne samjiha... (Anpadh)



Doli chad ke... (Heer Ranja)

I've no qualms in saying that dad went when it was destined and perhaps right. He went before becoming redundant... What if his music had suffered? He was relevant till the end

mutton. He'd invite his peers Kaifi Azmi, Chetan Anandji and of course Lataji (Mangeshkar).

"He was known as the *Saab* of the industry. He wore a suit for the races every Sunday. For classical concerts he'd be dressed in *kurta pyjama*. He'd also take us for Dara Singh's wrestling matches. There *Daraji* would say, '*Mere se zyada Madan Mohan ki muscles hai*'. He was that fit. He'd also take us for swim at the NSCI where he played billiards. While swimming he'd start humming. Back home he'd compose the tune on the harmonium and record it on his huge spool tape recorder (music reels on magnetic tape).

"There were days when we children would feign illness and bunk school only to accompany him to the studio. We'd sit in the control room and watch *Rafisaab* (Mohammed Rafi) and Lataji sing. We'd even sit on their laps. They'd pamper us with gifts. One recording I vividly remember was *Doli chad ke* (Heer Ranja). It was a traditional *bidaai* song. By the end of it

Shaukat Azmi and Lataji were in tears.

Award Angst

"Between the '50s-'60s he was the youngest composer among veterans Naushad, SD Burman, Anil Biswas and Shankar-Jaikishen. They had big banners with them – like SD Burman had Dev Anand's films, Naushadsaab had Dilip Kumar's and Shankar-Jaikishen Raj Kapoor's. Dad worked with the lesser banners and smaller stars. He couldn't spend on the musicians even if he had a great sense of orchestra. Even if his songs were popular the films were not.

"But he won the Filmfare nomination for *Anpadh* (1962). Naushad *saab* was so happy with his *ghazals* (*Aap ki nazron ne* and *Hai isi mein pyar ki aabroo*) in the film that he said, 'Give me these *ghazals* and take all my compositions'. But dad didn't win the award and was disappointed. One day he was driving us around in his huge, turquoise and white

Studebaker. Even the traffic police recognised his car. We kept telling him 'drive faster, drive faster'. Soon we heard police sirens behind us. Dad slowed down the car. The police officer sternly said, '*Madanji aapka gaana Aap ki nazron... kamal ka hai*'. Dad looked at my mother (the late Sheila Dhillon) and said, '*Yeh mera award hai*'.

"In 1966 he was nominated for *Mera Saaya*. But somehow his name was removed (*Titli udi* by Shankar-Jaikishen for *Suraj* won the best song of the year) from the list. Soon after that we were in the same car driving when he said, '*Kuch gaao beta!*' I started singing *Baharon phool barsao* (*Suraj*). He thought I'd sing *Jhumka gira re* (*Mera Saaya*). He looked at me from the rear view of the car and said, '*Tum bhi!*' He was hurt by the thought that if his children didn't sing his songs who would. Again he was nominated for *Woh Kaun Thi*. But he didn't win the award. Lataji came home and said, '*Bhaiya, mujhe afsos hai ki aapko award nahin mila*'. Dad said, '*Yeh kya kam hai ke Lata Mangeshkar ko afsos huwa?* Because the Filmfare Award always evaded him, he didn't show any excitement when he won the National

Award for *Dastak* (1972). He refused to pick it up. But Sanjeev Kumar said, 'If you don't come we'll (co-star Rehana Sultan and himself) also not go. The two men then wore identical suits and bows for the function.

The Muse and the Mentor

"Lataji's like our mother. Dad and she had a *bhai-behen* relationship. Her remuneration was high but for dad she even sang free. Ashaji (Bhosle) sang as many songs as Lataji for dad, but there was something about his chemistry with Lataji. Perhaps, she suited his style more. *Khayyam saab* would tell dad, 'I love you but I'm jealous of you. When Lata sings for you she sounds like someone else'. I've been on tours with Lataji. The minute she'd start a Madan Mohan song, there'd be deafening applause. Though OP Nayyarji never made Lataji sing, he said that the Lata-Madan combination was unparalleled.

Professional Passion

"Those days, dad was building a house in Lonavala. He'd often go there to supervise. One day he met with a bad accident whilst returning.

Madan Mohan trivia

● **HIS FIRST** influence was classical singer and neighbour Jaddan Bai (late Nargis' mother). He'd stand outside her window and listen

● **HE IMBIBED** the style of classical singer Barkat Ali Khan in his music

● **BEGUM AKHTAR** loved the *thumri*-based number *Kadar jaane na (Bhai Bhai)* and heard it for 22 minutes on the phone

● **HE MADE** Geeta Dutt sing *Aye dil mujhe bata de (Bhai Bhai)*

● **NUMBERS FROM** Nargis' *Adalat* like *Unko yeh shikayat hai, Yun hasraton ke daag* and *Jaana tha humse door* crowned him as 'the ghazal king'

● **HE COMPOSED** the famous patriotic number *Kar chale hum fida (Haqeeqat)*

● **THE VIOLIN** in *Main yeh soch kar (Haqeeqat)* was played by Pyarelal (of Laxmikant Pyarelal)

● **ZAROORAT HAI** *zaroorat hai* sung by Kishore Kumar (*Man Mauji*) became the first song to be remixed

● **IN LAG** *jaa gale (Woh Kaun Thi)* the melody is Indian but the chords are western



Madan Mohan

● **HIS HIT** songs like *Hum pyaar mein jalne walon ko (Jailor)*, *Aaj socha to aansoon (Hanste Zakhm)* and *Khelon na mere dil se (Haqeeqat)* were not included in the films

● **MOHAMMED RAFI** cited *Tumhare zulf ke saaye mein shaam (Naunihal)* as his best with Madan Mohan

● **HE USED** whispers and street sounds in *Tumse kahoon ek baat (Dastak)*

● **HE INTRODUCED** flautist Hari Prasad Chaurasia in *Jahan Ara*

● **MERI AANKHON** *se neend (Puja Ke Phool)* was entirely sitar-based played by his discovery Raees Khan

● **HIS MOST** popular number *Jhumka gira re (Mera Saaya)* was sung by Asha Bhosle



Tu jahan jahan chalega... (Mera Saaya)

His car fell in the valley but he jumped out. Yet he went straight to the recording studio and not to the hospital. Also, while recording *Nainon mein badra chaye (Mera Saaya)*, the musicians kept making mistakes and Lataji was getting tired. He lost his temper, banged his hand on the glass in the control room. It started bleeding. But he refused to get it attended to till they got it right. In 15 minutes after that the song was recorded.

The Last Years

"Towards the end of the '60s his generation of composers was fading. Some didn't have enough work, some had even passed away. The new brigade was taking over - RD Burman, Laxmikant-Pyarelal, Kalyanji-Anandji. Each composer had about 40 films. At times dad wouldn't get studios for recording and sometimes singers as they were all booked by the big banners. This aggravated his bitterness and insecurity and he started drinking heavily. Frustrated, he'd get into arguments. Often he'd sit in the music room alone. Though he was a jovial person, this sadness came out in his later songs. 'Main kya nahin kar raha hoon?' was his refrain whenever his versatility was questioned. One night he went to Chetan Anandji's house for the music of *Salim Anarkali*. He drank a lot and vomited blood. He was taken to the hospital. He died of cirrhosis of the liver. He was only 52.

Veer-Zaara

"As I mentioned earlier dad had recorded many

tunes on his spoons. When he passed away, I began playing them and heard songs from stalled films recorded in the voices of Rafisaab, Ashaji, Lataji and Talat Mehmood. I released those beautiful numbers in the album *Tere Bagair*. I also came upon several variations for the song *Dil dhoondhta hai (Mausam)* in his voice. One such tune haunted me. I wanted it to be heard. Then 30 years later this dream came true through *Veer-Zaara*. The biggest director of the country Yash Chopra used his music, the biggest stars Shah Rukh Khan and Preity Zinta featured in it. His song *Tere liye* became the biggest song of the year. It was preordained that dad's comeback be with the music for the love legends Veer Zaara after Heer Ranjha and Laila Majnu. When *Veer-Zaara* won a Filmfare nomination, I kept wishing he'd win. Life would've come full circle. It didn't though he won a host of other awards.

Death and Eternity

"I have no qualms in saying that he went when it was destined and perhaps right. He went before becoming redundant. Had he lived longer, he would've been left bitter. As a son it was a great loss, but as a music lover what if the quality of his music had suffered? You're after all remembered by your last work. *Laila Majnu* and *Mausam*, his last works, were hits. He was relevant till the end. Earlier I used to see him in my dreams not-so-happy. But now I only see his happy face."